

The Rose

PATTY LEWIS

Making sure the baby was asleep and that dinner was doing as well as could be expected, she crossed the dreary room another time to see if she could see Jim coming up the street. On her way to the window, she snapped on a light, hoping it would reach into the dark corners of the room until the ugly blackness there disappeared. But though the uncovered bulb glared brightly, it served only to make the garish furnishings more distasteful than ever.

The woman sighed. She hated the room. She hated being poor. She hated cleaning and scrubbing. She hated cheap clothes and cheap food. She hated always having to worry about paying bills and nagging Jim about money. She would not mind so much, though, she decided, if Jim did not hate the same things quite so fervently or loudly. Everything about their life appeared to irritate him — the baby seemed to be getting on his nerves constantly. If only the apartment were not so small! She pressed her hands to her temples wearily. Things would not matter so greatly — she would not complain — except that today was their wedding anniversary, and Jim had not even mentioned it. She could not remember when he had told her he loved her. This morning his conversation had been limited to a few unintelligible grunts and then some angry words because she had asked him not to stop at a tavern on his way home tonight with his paycheck. She should not have chosen that time to blurt out about the new baby, she reflected. His stoney silence had been almost more than she could bear.

It was getting late. He was probably well into his third beer by now. She moved over to a chair and tried to sit quietly with some mending, but her thoughts pounded in her head until she had to stop the pretense of sewing. What had happened to their marriage? Jim was so surly and uncommunicative. She would gladly struggle through sinks full of dishes and mountains of diapers if Jim would just come home and things would be as they once were. He never smiled or laughed anymore. If he would just come home! She dared not glance at the clock — perhaps something had happened! Each time he was late she went through agony — she must stop torturing herself, she knew.

She got up quickly and started walking around the room. She stopped in front of the mirror that poorly concealed one of the more obvious cracks in the wall-paper. She regarded herself intently. In the harsh light that illuminated her face, she looked worn and dull — even old. She was not old she wanted to cry out — but there was no one to hear her. She wanted to escape, she thought a little wildly — surely it was not too late.

Then she heard his steps on the stair, and she hastily composed herself. Relief mingled with anger as she waited for him to open the door, not knowing yet what she would say or do.

He walked into the room and stood there a trifle unsteadily. As she crossed the floor that separated them, she wrinkled her nose at the faintly perceptible odor of beer that clung to him. But she did not speak, for her gaze had traveled to his

hand and she saw he was holding a rose, one perfect blood-red rose still sparkling with tiny drops of water. For a moment she could not speak, and she watched his big hands clutch the stem of the rose so tightly that she was sure it would break as he waited for her reaction. She could move then, but before she buried her face in his rough coat, she noticed his smile at her evident surprise and pleasure. His

laugh sounded warm and familiar to her ears.

Later as Jim was washing for supper, she paused in front of the rose. As befits an anniversary present, it was placed in the most conspicuous place in the room. She saw that it was drooping a little in the closeness of the room, but it was still breath-taking in its beauty. It might be days before the petals would fall and before it would wither and die.

SONNET FOR CHRISTMAS EVE

GEORGE COFFIN

Omnipotence revealed! The hidden Lord
Displays Himself in messianic light
Of Word made man. The awful heavens accord
The whole divided—yet, divided, whole tonight.
Kneel down, bow low before the manger. Pour
The pungent myrrh upon the blessed ground;
Fill holy air with frankincense; adore
The King in solemn chants till earth resound.
Tonight?

Prepare the crib of soul, then wait
By open door of faith; let rise the scent
Of prayer that burns with hope. Not yet too late
To keep the feast before the night is spent.
This night the infant Prince of Peace will come;
Venite adoramus, Dominum.